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# NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW.

No. CCCCLXXII.

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MARCH, 1896.

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## AMERICA'S INTEREST IN EASTERN ASIA.

BY THE HON. JOHN BARRETT, UNITED STATES MINISTER TO  
SIAM.

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THERE are few if any questions pertaining to the foreign interests of the United States which are to-day more important than the question: What is or what shall be its material policy in Eastern Asia?

In other terms, shall the Great Republic be a strong or weak factor, a known or an unknown quantity, in working out the complex problem that presents itself in the development of Japan, Korea, China and Siam?

The apparent absence of positive American commercial influence and direct concern in the present *post-bellum* situation, and the seeming neglect of rare opportunity, are sufficient ground for proposing the question; the possibilities of the future, with their inevitable bearing upon our own prosperity, are ample reason for its discussion and answer.

It is not my privilege to examine the merits of our general diplomatic policy towards these Eastern nations, nor does the scope of the article require it. From the days of Caleb Cushing, Edmund Roberts, Townsend Harris, Anson Burlingame, and Commodore Perry to the present, the record is an honorable one; and I may be pardoned for expressing the selfish belief that

the representatives of the United States now in the Orient are doing all in their limited power to legitimately enhance the prestige of their land and flag. But they ask for that co-operation and assistance which can be rendered specifically by Congress and our commercial and maritime interests, and generally by the awakened sentiment of the American people. While it is our traditional policy not to achieve territorial aggrandizement by martial conquest, there is no precedent which says we shall not undertake commercial extension by peaceable conquest, and shape not only our foreign relations, but our home enterprises, with that purpose in view.

Frankly and truthfully stated—though not pleasing to our national pride—our country is not regarded by the Oriental people in their practical knowledge and relations as a Great Power in the common acceptance of the term ; it is not placed in the same category with Great Britain, France, Germany and Russia. Theoretically only do they class it with these ; they think of it with a vague, undefined conception—powerful perhaps but distant, grand in its home influence but having little concern in foreign affairs. To both the traveller and the permanent resident in the Orient this is constantly in evidence whether he be at a seaport or in the interior. A study of its cause finds speedy solution in our small and neglected maritime and trade interests. “Old Glory” is more of a curio to the Oriental than an emblem of progress and power. When the beautiful steam yacht of one of our millionaires anchored in Bangkok’s harbor, the natives learned from what country it came by comparing its ensign with the flag that floated over the United States Legation ! But this is not surprising in view of the fact that not one of the 517 merchant vessels that entered this busy port last year was American.

Yet in the light of results to be attained and of effects upon the ultimate standing of the races and nations of the world, it is not unreasonable to affirm that the United States has as great interest in the development of Eastern Asia as in that of South and Central America. It would be well if a fair share of the attention given to the latter countries and the energy exerted in exploiting them were diverted to that wonderful coast which reaches from Japan and Siberia to Java and Siam. Japan alone has more inhabitants than all of South America ; while the Nic-

aragua canal finds a greater argument for its construction in facilitating trade with the Orient than facilitating that with Western South America.

Get a map and look at that trans-Pacific coast ; get reliable authorities and study its history, resources and conditions ; get a ticket to cross the seas and travel from one end of it to the other ; get acquainted with it thoroughly and not superficially ; and then its possibilities as a powerful agent in shaping the history of men will be fully appreciated.

Extending right away for over 4,000 miles from Hakodate and Vladivostock to Bangkok and Singapore ; peopled with 400,000,000 restless beings ; busy with a great and growing commercial exchange ; provided with capacious harbors and thriving *entrepôts* of trade ; intersected by mighty rivers and canals ; possessed of uplands in which are found every mineral the earth produces, and of lowlands that are gardens of prodigal fertility ; densely populated in certain sections ; with vast resourceful areas unimproved ; presenting the extremes of progress and retrogression, of energy and sloth, of advanced civilization and lowest barbarism ; having histories and boasting of philosophies that antedate those of Christian nations ; and possibly at this very hour on the verge of momentous events which may necessitate the remaking of the maps of the world ; this section of Asia with all its phases and questions, indeed fascinates alike the diplomat and the tradesman, the politician and the economist, the conqueror and the peacemaker, the optimist and the pessimist.

What better indication can there be of what these countries can do than what they are doing ? What better proof of the value of this field is wanted than the business it already possesses ? What plainer evidence is at hand that the opportunity is not appreciated and improved by our own country than the comparison of its efforts and results with those of other lands ? Statistics and figures are usually dry and uninteresting, except when they bring important facts to light. They are quoted here to answer the questions just asked.

The total foreign trade of Japan, Korea, China, and Siam in 1894, roughly stated, was \$725,000,000,\* of which the share of Japan and China was \$665,000,000 ; of Siam and Korea,

\*The figures given are silver dollars. All calculations and transactions of the Asiatic coast are in silver, and with the fluctuating value of the same in gold it would be unsatisfactory to give the returns in the latter coin.

\$60,000,000. Were the trade of European colonies of the coast added to the above total it would reach the grand sum of nearly \$1,000,000,000.

Japan's foreign trade shows a remarkable increase from \$64,400,000 in 1885 to \$230,700,000 in 1894; that of China from \$229,809,000 in 1885 to \$435,300,000 in 1894; that of Siam, from \$19,400,000 in 1892 to \$42,000,000 in 1894.

In both Japan and China the imports from foreign countries exceed the exports, and show a greater increase than the latter from 1885 to 1894. Japanese imports increased from only \$28,300,000 in 1885 to \$117,400,000 in 1894, and her exports from \$36,100,000 to \$113,200,000 in 1894; China's imports developed in the same years from \$132,300,000 to \$243,150,000 and her exports from \$97,500,000 to \$192,150,000.

The excess of China over Japan is not large in view of the fact that China has eight times the population of Japan and her customs returns are made from 24 ports, against only six in Japan.

We have now seen how great is the volume of the trade of these countries and how extensively they purchase from other lands. The share of the United States in this commercial exchange is next to be noted. Japan's imports from the United States in 1894 amounted to \$11,000,000 approximately, but imports from England were over \$42,000,000, and yet Japan is almost 9,000 miles nearer San Francisco than London. Imports from other European countries reached nearly \$16,000,000. In short, Japan's imports from all Europe were \$58,000,000, or five times in excess of her American imports. A careful examination of the schedule of imports, however, shows that the United States can produce and manufacture fully 60 per cent. of the goods represented by that \$58,000,000.

In the matter of exports from Japan the showing is still more remarkable. Her exports to the United States in 1894 were over \$43,000,000, or a balance against us of \$32,000,000! Contrast this with England. Her purchases from Japan were only \$6,000,000, or a splendid balance in her favor of \$34,000,000! The United States provides Japan with her best market. The nearest approach is France with purchases of \$19,000,000, which are largely silk remanufactured, and then sold perhaps as extensively in the United States as in other lands.

The moral from these figures is plain. If the exporters of the United States wishing to trade with Japan would show as much energy and interest as their brother importers who have their best men stationed in the Mikado's realm to buy the first qualities of teas, silks, and curios, they could develop a greater market, and either make the balance in favor of America or at least equalize the exchange.

In China is another object lesson of American opportunity neglected, another illustration of an unfavorable balance. China's imports from the United States in 1894 approximated \$10,000,000, her exports \$25,000,000, or a debit balance for the United States of \$15,000,000. From England her imports were \$45,000,000 against exports of \$36,000,000, or a credit balance in favor of that kingdom of \$9,000,000. A minute study of the schedule of China's imports from England and other European countries permits the same conclusion that obtains in a like inspection of Japan's imports; there is no valid reason in the nature of the goods themselves why a major per cent. of them should not come from the United States. Were this paper merely a technical one, I would quote liberally from the specific customs' returns of China, Japan, and Siam, to substantiate more fully this assertion, but this is the work of trade reports. Not only could a large proportion of these articles be exported from America, but an investigation of both wholesale and retail prices proves that the American products could be sold at a reasonable profit.

Whatever may be the exact hindrances, there is no question that the decadence and threatened extinction of our merchant marine is a mill-stone around the neck of our foreign commerce. Let American shipping interests, fostered by the helping hand of Congress, regain their hold of former days in these waters, and our trade with the Orient will increase with a pace that will warm the heart of the coldest blooded misanthrope.

The shipping returns of Japan well nigh impel the patriotic American to hide his face in shame. Into the ports of that little kingdom, just over the sea from California, Oregon and Washington, there entered in 1894 only 32 steamers flying the Stars and Stripes out of a total of 1,788, and this paltry number showed a decrease of five from 37 in 1893! Out of a total tonnage of 2,539,951, the steamers of that nation whose fleet once ruled the ocean wide could muster only 83,350. Along with our

lonely 32 steamers were 850 British and 370 German. In sailing vessels our showing was somewhat better, but there we were outnumbered again by the British.

I hesitate to speak of our shipping in China lest I be accused of misrepresentation, but as it is the purpose of this article to tell the truth and awaken interest in the hunt for the Golden Fleece of far Cathay, I must make no exceptions. Shanghai is the most important port of China. In 1894, 2,844 merchant steamers with a tonnage of 3,394,918 entered that port but not one was American! Not one American trading steamer came to Newchwang out of 348; not one to Tientsin of 645; not one to Cheefoo of 1,031; not one to Chinkiang of 1,493; not one to Foochow of 294; not one to Canton of 2,250. Kind Amoy only breaks the mournful record, where four lone steamers out of 822 found a haven in her quiet waters. Hong Kong of course is the terminal point of our few trans-Pacific steamer lines, but that is not strictly a Chinese port. A small number of sailing ships wandering up and down the coast, and a few men-of-war cruising here and there, alone carried our flag into China's waters. I have already mentioned how lonesome the Legation ensign is in Siam.

In face of all these facts and conditions it is as palpable as the sun in the sky that American maritime and trade interests in this part of the world are not only grossly neglected, but afford an opportunity for vigorous development that it is ludicrous and inconsistent to deny.

Who is to blame? If Congress, let it proceed to legislate the remedy. If shippers and exporters, manufacturers and merchants, let them enter upon a campaign of education and development. If the American people at large, let them awake to the fact that the principle of the survival of the fittest must apply to nations, that commerce is their life-giving energy, and that without such life blood the United States cannot be numbered among the fittest.

To the Nicaragua canal reference has already been made, but it is of sufficient importance to invite more consideration. Were any man who is now opposed to its construction to thoroughly study its bearing on our commercial relations with Eastern Asia and all the other countries of the Pacific seas, it is probable that he would be convinced of the error of his position. The best

British trade experts openly state that its completion will place the United States in a position to control the markets of the Pacific. Mr. A. S. Colquhoun, whose life and energies seem to be devoted to the advancement of Great Britain's foreign trade, has recently in an exhaustive discussion shown how completely in the event of its construction can the United States dominate every market north of Hong Kong and south east of Java, that is, Japan, Korea, northern and central China, Australia, and New Zealand and the islands of Australasia. The extent of the present commerce and traffic between Europe and the Pacific is measured to a large extent by the greatly increasing business of the Suez canal. The tonnage passing through the canal in 1894 reached the enormous volume of 11,750,000 tons, and its receipts the astonishing figures of 75,500,000 francs or about 15,100,000 gold dollars. The Nicaragua canal may not show such traffic and revenues at first, but it will not have long to wait. It will enable the South not only to supply the increasing demand for raw cotton in Japan and China which is destined to reach a great figure in the near future, but it will place the manufacturing centres of the Atlantic seaboard and the Central West 1,200 to 2,000 miles nearer the great markets of Japan, Korea, and Northern China. In brief it will give manufacturing and productive America a clear basis of advantage in the matter of water routes and transportation. In 1894, the exports of the United States to all the countries of Eastern Asia did not reach \$15,000,000 gold, while those of Europe exceeded \$75,000,000. Two years after the Nicaragua canal is opened, I deem it no exaggeration to say that our trans-Pacific trade will exceed \$75,000,000 or a sum almost sufficient to construct it.

To enumerate all the conditions, the lack of which have retarded the development of our Asiatic trade in the past, and the presence of which will materially assist it, would consume more space than is at the writer's disposal. That I may not be guilty, however, of diagnosing a disease without naming a remedy, a few suggestions are given as a result of considerable investigation.

Aside from the building up of our merchant marine and the opening of the Nicaragua Canal, are the following: the establishment of reliable branch American houses to handle all classes of American products; the sending of representatives



possessing experience, tact, and thorough knowledge of their lines, both to study the Oriental demand and develop a market; Chambers of Commerce, Boards of Trade, banking and commercial agencies, obtaining full and truthful data on the demands of markets, the most direct and the cheapest routes, and the financial rating of Asiatic buyers; offering inducements similar and equal to those offered by European merchants, such as favorable terms of purchase and credit, opportunity and time to take advantage of advance in exchange; sending consignments on commission; packing and preparing goods with great care, sending only the best quality and at competitive rates, and securing prompt despatch; liberal advertising in the press of the leading ports; the establishment, where feasible, of papers under American control; Americans entering the employ of Asiatic governments, where hundreds of Europeans now have a monopoly and are quiet promoters of European interests; the possible sending of commercial missions, like those sent out by the Chambers of Commerce of French, British, and German manufacturing centres; the reasonable subsidizing of steamship lines, such as is now done with profit by the chief countries of Europe; maintaining an effective naval squadron to "show the flag" and protect American interests; and last, but assuredly not least, increasing the efficiency of legations and consulates by providing a sufficient and competent staff to perform the manifold duties incumbent upon them, proper buildings for offices, and sufficient allowances to maintain the same on an equality with those of other nations. A commercial *attaché* at each legation who could devote his entire time to his work would prove a valuable addition to the usual force, and his appointment a worthy innovation upon the present system.

In regard to the cheap labor of Japan and China, there is no doubt that it presents a grave question, but it is one that time alone can solve. It is not such as to debar or deter American producers and manufacturers from entering the field. The day is yet distant, if it ever comes, when there will not be a great demand for foreign products in Japan, China, Siam and Korea. Our commercial interests must not be kept from the conquest by the reports of retired manufacturers who have made their own fortunes at home and report impressions gained by superficial observations of leisurely travel; by correspondents who come in by

one door, as it were, and go out by the next ; or by alarmists who hold the sixpence of European competition and Asiatic cheap labor so near their eye that they cannot see any good beyond.

In conclusion, a word more can be appropriately said concerning what I would term the "Importance of the Asiatic Opportunity." China is on the point of great development. Such a land cannot remain in material darkness. With her rivers, her plains, her plateaux, her mountains, all suggestive of latent power and possibilities, she is now where the United States was sixty years ago before the era of marvellous advancement. The conditions of race and population are different, but the raw material is there. Japan has on foot gigantic schemes for the further improvement of her land and people, while rich and undeveloped Formosa is awaiting her best efforts. Korea has vast unimproved mineral and agricultural resources. Siam is a garden with only the paths laid out and a fringe of flowers along their sides. And yet the same lands are the home of histories, religions, philosophies and peoples that were ancient before the United States were born.

Curzon in his "Problems of the Far East," and Norman in "The Far East," the latest and most exhaustive works on Eastern Asia, after studying these countries long and carefully, have used stronger language than I have employed. Unless all signs fail, a new era is coming in modern history. A "Pacific Question" is developing apace. The Atlantic must share its glories and power with its sister sea. As the latter is mightier in extent than the former, it may yet be the scene of mightier events in shaping the world's history.

In the new adjustment of international relations and the rearrangement of the world's commerce which must inevitably result, it remains for our country to decide whether its hand will be strong or weak.

JOHN BARRETT.